Course Syllabus

Ling 216 Words in English

Prof. Suzanne Kemmer

Course Description

This course applies linguistic principles to the study of the English vocabulary. We will examine the rich stock of morphemes, or meaningful elements, in English words, and observe how these combine to derive much of the vocabulary of English. Other topics include the development of the English vocabulary, derivational processes, articulatory (i.e. pronunciation) processes, etymology (word origins and histories), sound change and meaning change, the linguistic relations of English, sources of new words, usage and variation, and slang. No previous experience with Linguistics is required.

As far as possible, students will be encouraged to make their own investigations and discuss their findings and questions about words in class. Students will work to increase their mastery of English vocabulary from the technical, literary, scientific and other domains by acquiring recurrent morphemes and words incorporating them; and by generally increasing their awareness of the structure, history, and use of English words.

Expected Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, the student should

- have an awareness of the internal structure of words and of the systematic relationships among words in English
- have a basic understanding of the history of the English language, with particular reference to the major periods of vocabulary expansion that it has undergone and how those periods are reflected in the modern lexicon
- understand some basic principles of language change that have affected the English language, including principles of sound change and meaning change
- know the basic stock of Classical roots and affixes that recurrently appear in English words; be able to interpret newly encountered words incorporating elements of that stock
- be familiar with a wide range of words and their origins, meanings, and domains of use; be able to apply the knowledge gained so as to be able to say something about the origin and/or meaning of unfamiliar words
- understand how the study of words can be used as an access point into knowledge and history of an entire culture, and be able to further pursue such knowledge via the study of words
- have a good working knowledge of the incredibly rich lexical resources available in the English language, providing a basis for increased mastery of the spoken and written language

Course Requirements

Study Test #1	15%
Study Test #2	15%
Midterm #1	25%
Midterm #2	20%
10 Vocab Quizzes	5%
Word Journal	15%
Presence/Participation	5%
Total: 100 course points	100%
Extra credit:	up to 5%
Total possible points in class:	105
Minimum course points required to pass:	60

Course Schedule

A detailed course schedule is found in the above link.

Quizzes and Exams

Exam and Quiz nature and dates
All exams (both longer exams, and the short exams called quizzes) are administered online through Canvas through the Quizzes tool. They are largely multiple choice, T/F, fill in the blank. They are closed book and timed (see below).

The course will have 4 exams: 2 midterms ("midterm" is a Rice word for a non-final exam) and 2 Study tests (somewhat shorter exams meant to consolidate knowledge and prepare you for the midterms). There is no final exam.

Note that Midterm #2, the last of the 4 exams, will be activated during the last week of classes. More on the timeframe for this particular exam will be given later.

In addition, there are 10 short vocabulary quizzes on the sets of Word elements found in most of the chapters of the textbook. Most of these are activated on Wednesdays, and due the Friday of that week.

The dates for the quizzes will be posted on Canvas. If a quiz needs to be moved, advance notice will be given in class and in Announcements on Canvas.

Exam coverage
The vocabulary quizzes, as stated above, are based on the sets of Word Elements following most of the chapters of our textbook.

The longer exams - the Midterms and Study Tests - will cover readings, two DVD episodes, class discussions, the web materials in the Course Content Links, and any materials distributed in class. They will NOT directly test the vocabulary elements in the quizzes. However, if we discuss a quiz word in class or it otherwise appears in the materials outside the word sets, it is part of the materials that you can be tested on in the exams.

Exam and quiz policies
Any illness or other disaster that keeps a student from taking an exam or quiz during the time period set must be reported to me (kemmer@rice.edu) before the exam is due (if you can't notify me, then ask your parent or college master to do so). There are no make-up exams or quizzes for non-emergency situations.

Honor Code issues

Honor code for exams
All 4 exams in the course are pledged, closed book, closed notes, closed mouths and ears (don't talk to anybody about anything remotely resembling the subject of the course or the words involved), and closed internet (including internet on mobile devices like phones and tablets) during exam. The same restrictions apply to the Quizzes. They are worth a lot less for your grade, but for any of us to get any value out of them, all students must play by the same rules.

The time given for quizzes and exams is intended to give more than enough time to finish if you have kept up with the material and studied it.

Honor code for Word Journal

The aim in the Word Journal is to catch words 'in the wild', and write short original analyses of them yourself. Doing this will help you learn to notice novel words and novel uses of words, and to reflect on and write about them using the linguistic knowledge you have gained in this class.

Catching a word 'in the wild' means hearing or reading it yourself, used in context. Anything else is out of bounds for purposes of the assignment.

Students are welcome, in fact encouraged, to talk about their Word Journals with classmates, as long as they don't use for their Journals words collected from other Ling 215 students (current or former). Some people will come up with some of the same words independently, but that's OK as long as you caught the word 'in the wild' yourself. Your own journal entry for the word (all of the writing you submit for these assignments) must be original to you.

The words you submit must also not be taken from any collection of new words, on line or in any print materials. In such collections, the words were noticed in context by someone else, not you,

and it would thus defeat the purpose of the assignment and violate the academic standards for this assignment.

To avoid unclarity about academic standards relating to use of the World Wide Web, these standards are posted on the following links:

- New words guidelines
- Using Web Sources: Basic Academic Standards
- Creating Web Materials: Basic Academic Standards; Copyright Issues

Students should consult these before using the web to produce coursework (in this or any course!!)

Disabilities

Any student with a disability requiring accommodations in this class is encouraged to contact me after class or in office hours. Contact also the Disabled Student Services office in the Ley Student Center to find out how they can be of further assistance.

Class policy for use of electronic devices

You can use a laptop for note-taking and for following along with links shown on the projector in class; and also for looking up items under discussion in class, such as etymologies.

Not allowed: web-surfing, viewing videos, and using social media. This is too distracting from the class, not only for you but for those around you and for me as well.

Put away phones entirely. You can use a phone in class only for looking up etymologies we are discussion, or some other related point about words under discussion.

Grading

Grading is done by points. The course has 100 points total, plus a maximum of 5 additional points for an extra credit project . The mean is set at about a B-.

To pass the class, a student needs 60% or more of the total 100 points.

A word to the wise: A fair amount of material in the course is not known to most speakers of English. And unfortunately, most speakers of English believe a good number of myths about the language. It is probably not possible to pass the course relying on "general knowledge", since so much of what passes for general knowledge about English and about language in general is simply false: there are many popular misconceptions about English and about language in our culture, often dating back centuries and spread through the school curriculum.

A large part of the course consists of information that is completely new to most speakers, or at least different from what they thought was the case. So reading the book, web pages, and attending class is necessary to do well.

Extra credit

Up to 5% extra credit can be earned by making a multimedia presentation, to be shown in class, about some aspect of words in English. Generally this presentation will be a video of approximately 3-5 minutes in length.

Your topic can be basically anything that relates to the material of the course. Your video can go into more depth than the course did in some area. For example, one possible topic might be a particular set of loanwords from a particular language we did not talk much about: Arabic, Dutch, Malay, Chinese....and how this set of words came into English via cultural contact between speakers of that language and English.

You can work in pairs, but for two the length of the video should be 8-10 minutes.

See me or email me if you want to broach a possible topic for this kind of extra credit project.

Fondren Library has a digital media center in the basement where you can get facilities and equipment. Also the Center for Oral and Visual Communication has resources.

There is a student video contest that the Rice Center for Civic Engagement, in cooperation with the Digital Media Center, is putting on in spring. One of the categories is research, so any class project is eligible apparently. You can treat your extra credit video for this class as a planned entry to the spring contest. The website for the contest is: Video Contest.

Needless to say, you can also enter the video contest with a video completely unrelated to our class, although it doesn't count for extra credit!

Text and reference materials

Textbook
Keith Denning, William Leben, and Brett Kessler, *English Vocabulary Elements,* New York: Oxford Unversity Press, 2006, second edition.

Note that the required version is the the SECOND EDITION and not the outdated 1995 first edition.

There is a digital version of the textbook for about $25. There should also be arriving some hard copies in the bookstore by the time class begins. Amazon has new and used copies and there may be some around Rice.

Other reference materials and content

Other materials include dictionaries, the links provided in the class, the DVDs viewed in class, and materials created by students. I will give a link to a list of some of these and others will be incorporated into the Modules and Pages of this Canvas site.

Word Journal project

An ongoing piece of writing in this class is the Word Journal project. The purpose is to get you attuned to the words in the language used around you. Your assignment is to notice and collect neologisms and figure out how and why they were created; and to describe the various linguistic processes they demonstrate.

The Word Journal is covered under the Honor Code as well: you have to 'catch' the words in use yourself -- that means you must hear or read them in a real context, and not take them from anyone else's written or online discussion of them as words; and your definitions for the words must be in your own words. See the three links below under Honor Code issues for further explication.

The Word Journal will take a fair amount of time, but it can be done in small increments. It is advisable to use the whole semester to collect and write about the words. There is nothing worse than trying to find a whole bunch of words and think of things to write about them in a short period of time. The project will go smoothly if you do a little at a time and keep up with the class so you can use concepts from the course in your observations about the words.

The due date for the Word Journal will be in the last week of classes. You will keep them in a Word file which you must submit, but also upload them to the Neologisms database (more on that later.)